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BUSINESS

SAFER CIGARETTE TO HAVE LESS NICOTINE
The Associated Press

THE STATE

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. -- Production of a cigarette that its maker says has fewer cancer-causing ingredients has begun as Durham-based Vector Tobacco gears up for sales expected to start in retail stores later this month.

Vector Tobacco says its new Omni cigarette brand is made with a chemical treatment that reduces certain cancer-causing elements in cigarette smoke. A second product, Omni Free, will come out next year using the treatment, plus a new type of tobacco genetically engineered to contain virtually no nicotine.

Vector Tobacco, owned by Miami-based Vector Group Ltd., is a sister company to the Liggett Group Inc., the smallest of the major tobacco companies. Liggett, based in Mebane, was the first cigarette-maker to break ranks with the industry and settle lawsuits brought by state attorneys general.

Overall, the company is investing about \$100 million in what it calls its "less hazardous" smoking products.

Despite the technological advances, cancer-causing chemicals would still be present in the new cigarettes, Vector Group's chairman and chief executive officer admitted earlier this year.

"While there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, we believe we've eliminated what the health community considers to be the most serious cancer-causing agents with these developments," Bennett LeBow said.

Some investors are betting there are big things ahead for the company. Vector Group's stock has climbed about 200 percent this year.

----- INDEX REFERENCES -----

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